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“An asymmetrical telecollaborative project and the evolution of its learning design: the *Université Blaise Pascal* – *London School of Economics* experience”

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Telecollaboration

- Regular, semi-authentic interaction
- Strategies for learner independence (O'Rourke, 2007)
- Exposure to opportunities for negotiation of meaning (Kötter, 2003)
- Awareness of cultural differences in communicative practices (Belz & Kinginger, 2003)
- Exchanging with 'real informants' of the target culture and its behaviour (O'Dowd, 2013)

Telecollaboration - symmetric learning situation

- Break away from the « teacher-student routine of classroom exchanges » : (Bouyssi & Nissen, 2013)
- Learners have ‘symmetry of status’ (cf. Zourou, 2009)
 - Same status as language learners
 - Equal amounts of time using each of two languages
- Learners have ‘symmetry of knowledge’ (cf. Dillenbourg, 1999)
 - Experts in own language
 - Similar L2 levels

Asymmetry – institutional level

UBP, France

LSE, UK

Status of University within country

TES World rankings
– not ranked

TES World rankings
32

Curricular integration

Language Centre
Programmes not so flexible
Align topics with course modules

Approaches to language teaching

10-week semester beginning
mid-September

30/20 week programmes depending
on course (degree/extra-curricular)

Institutional valorisation

Asymmetry – course level

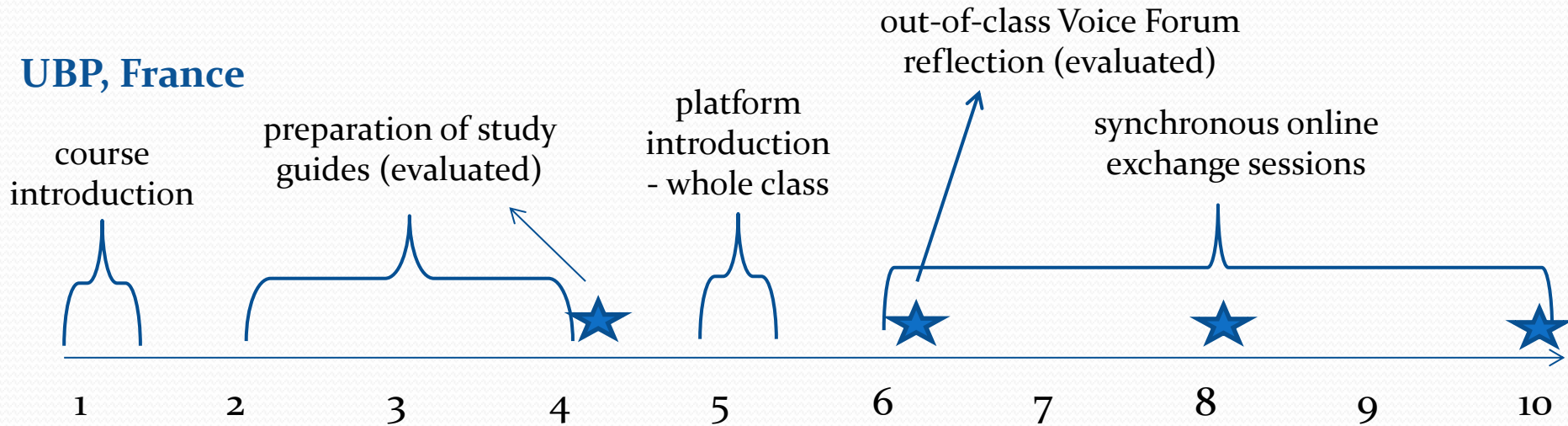
UBP, France	LSE, UK
Compulsory course (specific group)	Voluntary basis
Objectives – interactional & cultural (semester abroad)	Objectives –practise language in context to complement course
Applied foreign language degree	Students of other disciplines enrolled on language courses
10 weeks, 20 hours, 2,5 ECTS	5 weeks, 5 hours
Assessment – in line with other Spoken English courses	No assessment Part of Tandem Learning programme

Asymmetry – participants

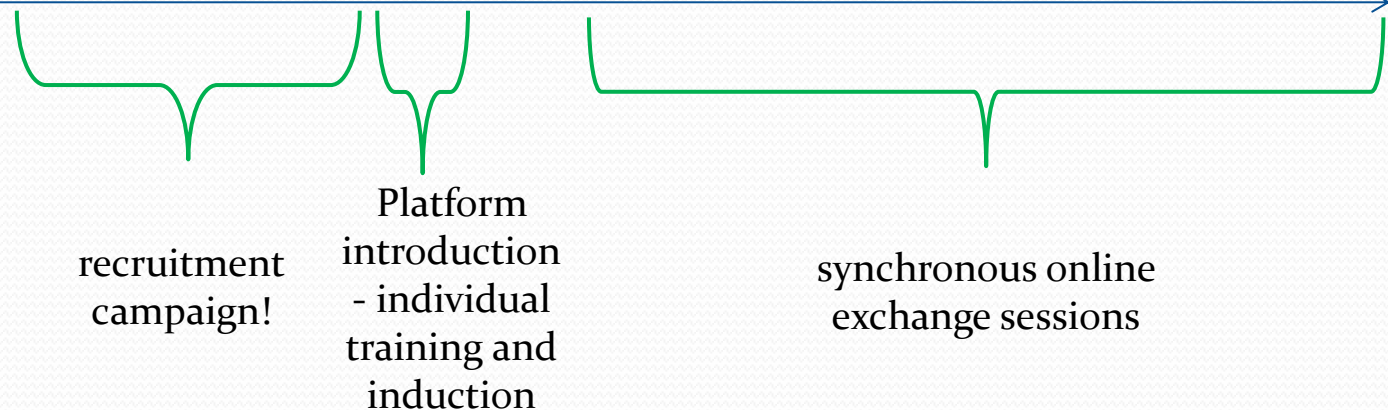
		UBP, France	LSE, UK
Us!	{	Group's language teacher	Teaching and learning facilitators (learning support)
		Mostly native speakers of French (12)	Many non-native speakers of English (8)
Students	{	Spent at least six-months in Anglophone country	May not have spent time in a French-speaking country
		Motivation?	Highly motivated (volunteers)
		Two-year participation	Commitment to 5 sessions only

Reconciliation of calendar differences

UBP, France



LSE, UK



Online exchange sessions

- Communicative approach
- Alternate languages
- Discussion based on questions produced by UBP students

1. Describe the video of the American presidential debate. What were the main themes and arguments of the candidates?
2. OLP students, explain the following expressions to your LSE partners. LSE students, check that they have understood and can use them correctly!
 - to tweak something
 - corporate jet
 - to be sound
 - something is on the table
 - to go down the path of sth
3. Why do people accept propaganda without questioning?
4. What do you think about the following quotation: "political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind"?
5. What impact do you think the political election in the US will have on your country?

Evolution of the project

- Remove hindrances
- Multidimensional approach:
 - Platform
 - Content
 - Grouping

Year One: Second Life



Evolution - platform

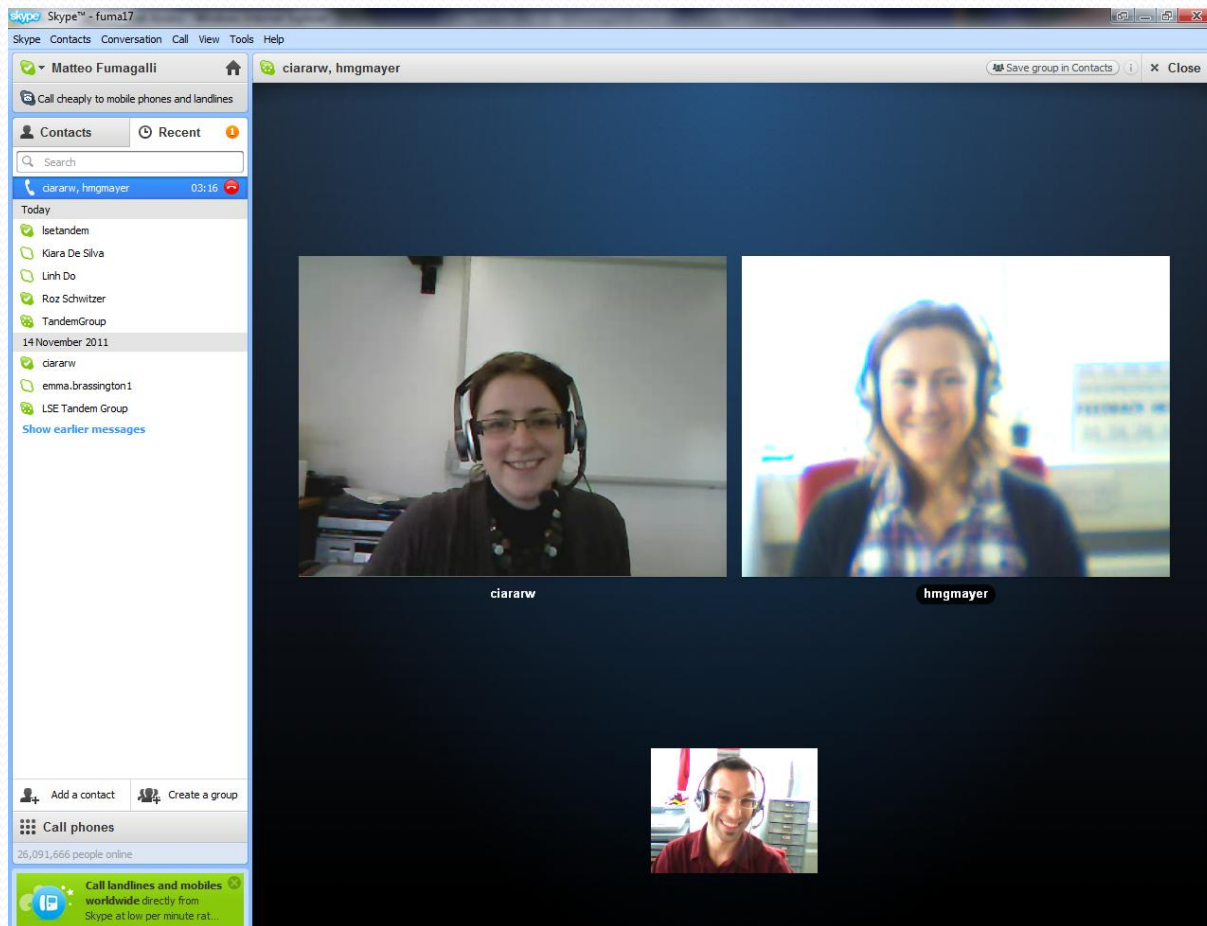
Pros:

- **Anonymous**
- **Creative/Task Based:** avatar, session planning
- **Ease of Navigation:** Fairly easy

Cons:

- **Less personal** – no one sees your face, language not so genuine?
- **Technical:** regular updates necessary, loss of sound, loss of connection (dependent on school's connection), Easy for avatars to get lost, get logged off
- **Training:** Training required (not all students are familiar with the platform), the platform itself could be seen as a distraction

Year Two: Skype



Evolution - platform

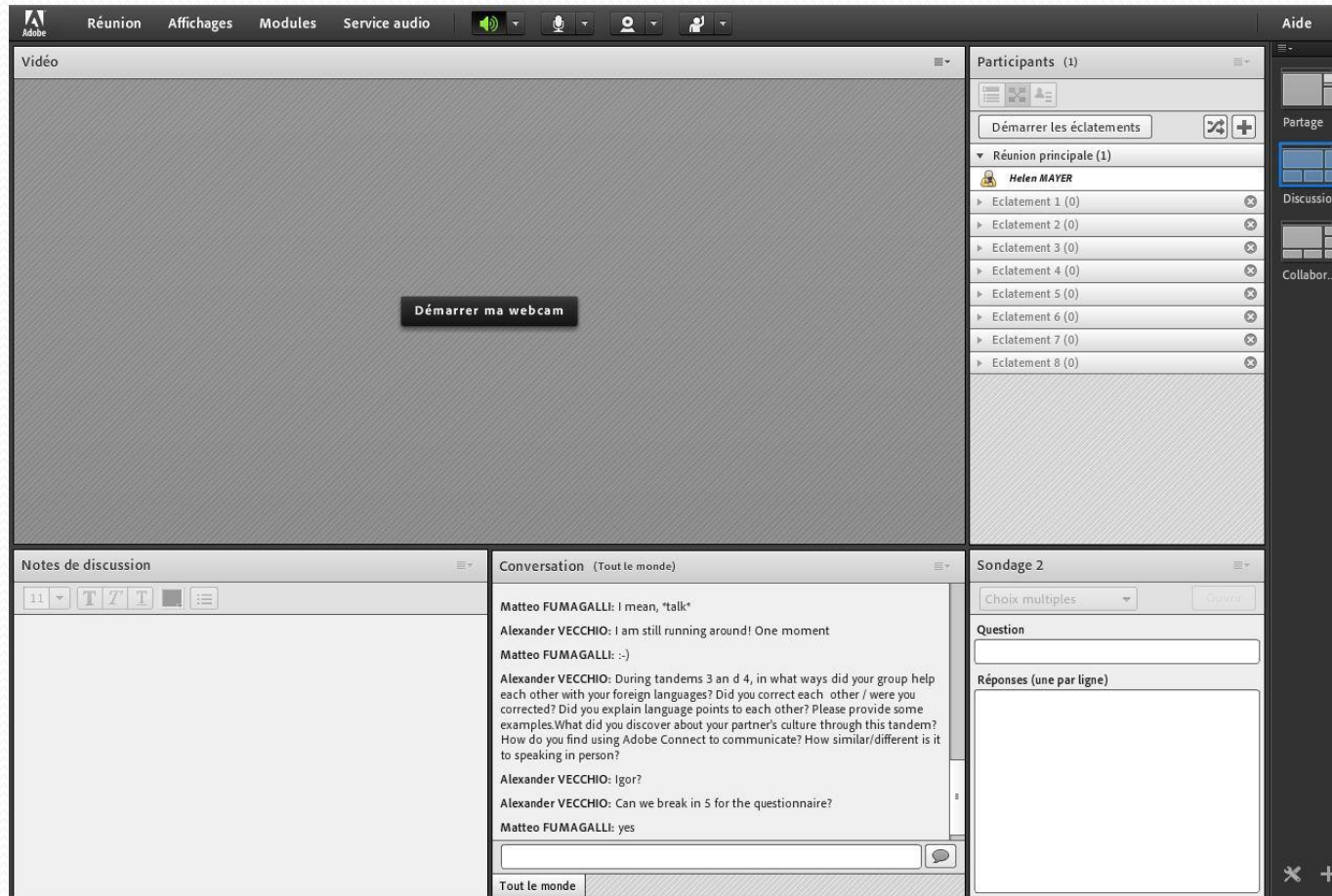
Pros:

- **Simple:** A need to simplify and get back to basics; Communication in the foreign language with no distractions the advantages of Second Life can also be its downfall.
- **Technical:** less hitches than Second Life e.g. less sound issues
- **Ease of Navigation:** impossible to 'get lost' as in Second Life
- **Less Training:** Less needed, many students have Skype accounts, less training required than Second Life

Cons:

- Not immersive
- Less room for creativity
- Not task based
- No group conversation available (pay-for Premium account only)

Year Three: Adobe Connect



Evolution - platform

Pros:

- UBP had the platform already
- **Technical:** More reliable than Skype: more stable, quality of sound including video much better
- **Additional functionalities:** Put students in classes, whiteboard function
- **Ease of Navigation:** Similar format to Skype

Cons

- **Expensive:** Need for at least one party to buy software licence, UBP already had the platform, LSE students were able to logon remotely without the software

Evolution – synchronous sessions' content

- Course topics
- Academic interest
- Content as expedient to trigger dynamic conversation
- Feedback: interesting topics were key for success

Evolution – synchronous sessions' content

Topics covered:

- 2010: Bizutage (hazing), national stereotypes, binge drinking, language, social inequality
- 2011: Arab Spring, London Riots, social networks, banking crisis
- 2012: Language as a political instrument, Commonwealth / Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, suburbs, national identity
- 2013: debate over a seven day shopping week, stereotypes French African Vs African American, political protest around the retirement age reform, British vs. French stereotypes

“I found them extremely useful, especially because of the themes treated during the lessons, which allowed me and my French counterparts to discuss actual issues and share our opinions and points of view.” (LSE student)

Learning design - Study Guides

- Involve students in preparation of synchronous online exchange sessions
- Parallel texts

1

- Choose groups of three
- Choose current affairs topic of interest

2

- Find at least two video resources (1 Eng, 1 Fr)
- Produce guide to aid other students when watching videos

3

- Summary of text, vocabulary observations, idiomatic language observations,
- Cultural references, design a list of discussion questions

- Guide sent weekly to students to prepare for online discussion sessions. Questions basis for these.

Expression 5:	"tirage au sort"	Level: -- - = (+)++
Situation Co-text:	"le tirage au sort vous a désigné pour parler en premier, c'est donc Nicolas Sarkozy qui conduira cette émission."	
Language Co-text:	"J'ai gagné au tirage au sort de Loto."	
Typically used by (circle all applicable categories):	children teenagers young adults adults older adults	
Meaning:	laisser le destin décider de quelqu'un, laisser le hasard faire les choses. On choisit au hasard.	

- Group evaluation using same criteria as other Spoken English courses

Evolution – grouping

- Second Life
 - Moving avatars
 - Flexible
 - location-based
- Skype
 - 1-2-1
 - fixed groups
 - premium
- Adobe connect
 - class spaces (2+2)

Student experience of telecollaboration

- Study Guides

“The study guides were **useful in providing a focus** to each session, and the **videos were helpful in providing the context**. I feel that **more resources** could be given to place the issues in more context and perhaps websites that talk about the issues so that we have **more arguments** to give during our tandem sessions”

“It is helpful as we can practice speaking, but **once we ran out of questions it became awkward for both of us**. We did not know what else to talk about.”

“I didn’t really use the study guides very often, but the premise of having a video and some questions is **a good idea for people who have trouble making conversation**. I am generally good at talking (too much!) so they weren’t that needed in my case”

Students' experience of platform

- Multimodality: ease / linguistic breakdowns

“Once we switched on the webcams, it was almost like speaking in person but **less daunting** than actually conversing in person”

“Adobe Connect seems to be perfect software for such communication: **whenever there were misunderstandings, we would type messages to each other or even share files**”

“I especially like the fact **we can write to explain spelling or expressions** that we don't understand orally”

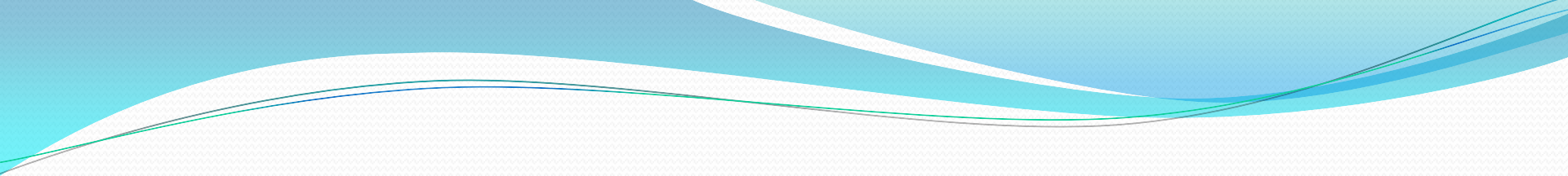
“Sometimes **we would go on the internet to send a link to explain**”

Students' feedback on asymmetry

- Obligation to participate not felt by LSE students.

“I feel that although the students from the UBP receive a credit, they were still really interested in communicating with us and exchanging cultures.”

“In my opinion, it did not. It never felt like the French side felt any obligation to be participating in this tandem: it was a very friendly experience.”

- 
- UBP - General opinion that the asymmetry didn't affect the interactions
 - Impressed by the fact the LSE students volunteer
“enthusiastic” “motivated every time” “really involved in the exchanges” “very active”

“It's a ‘sharing relationship’ and they seem to be as involved as we are”

- Asymmetry of action (differences in task distribution) felt by 50% of the LSE students concerning the focus of interactions

“The only difference I felt was that while **I was interested in learning more about them and their culture**, they were more focused on the study guides and **did not digress from the topics at hand at all.**”

“The obvious point is that the students from the University Blaise Pascal **took the pre-reading/preparation more seriously.** But this wasn't a problem per se. I don't think receiving credit is a necessary condition for the tandems' success.”

“Students from Blaise Pascal were **concerned about sticking strictly to the questions** and getting answers for them, whereas I **was more interested in a spontaneous discussion.**”

Conclusion – practical leads & strategies for reconciling asymmetrical set ups

- Negotiate calendar
- Understand student motivation
- Distribution of tasks (preparing materials)
- Manage expectations
- Strong commitment from tutors! Particularly in an asymmetrical set-up.

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